

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1856

As Passed Legislature

Title: An act relating to excused absences from school for search and rescue activities.

Brief Description: Excusing student absences for state-recognized search and rescue activities.

Sponsors: By Representatives Morell, O'Brien, Talcott, Miloscia, Quall, Carrell, Rockefeller, Bush, Cox, Pflug, Pearson and Woods.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 1/28/02, 1/31/02 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/13/02, 96-0.

Senate Amended.

Passed Senate: 3/5/02, 48-0.

House Concurred.

Passed House: 3/9/02, 94-0.

Passed Legislature.

Brief Summary of Bill

- With the approval of a student's parent and school principal, a student may be excused from school for up to five days each year to participate in state-recognized search and rescue activities.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Quall, Chair; Haigh, Vice Chair; Talcott, Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Cox, McDermott, Rockefeller, Santos, Schmidt and Upthegrove.

Staff: Susan Morrissey (786-7111).

Background:

By law, with some exceptions, all children between the ages of 8 and 18 must attend

school. Children who attend public school may be absent under limited conditions. The school district must excuse children who are physically or mentally unable to attend school. They must also excuse students who are absent at the parents' request for a purpose that has been agreed upon by the parents and school authorities. However, the school cannot excuse absences that are deemed to have a seriously adverse effect on the student's educational progress.

The chief law enforcement officer of each city or county is responsible for local search and rescue operations. These operations are conducted under the auspices of state and local plans that have been adopted by the local county or city governing board. The operations are coordinated by the local director of emergency management. Under certain conditions, the state will compensate local jurisdictions for the costs associated with search and rescue activities.

Summary of Bill:

School districts are strongly encouraged to grant excused absences for up to five days each year to students participating in state recognized search and rescue activities, as long as the students' parents and principals approve and the absences will not have a seriously adverse effect upon the students' educational progress.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not Requested.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: The Explorer Search and Rescue Program, like other comparable programs, plays a vital role in augmenting the work of law enforcement officers. Through the program, students are recruited, trained, and supported as they help law enforcement officers search for lost children and Alzheimer's patients, gather evidence, and rescue lost hikers and climbers. Many students have had their lives enriched as a result of these opportunities. This legislation will help legitimize student requests to be excused from school for a limited amount of time to participate in search and rescue activities.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Representative Morell, prime sponsor; and Grant Smith, Washington Explorer Search and Rescue.